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ORGANIZATIONS

The Americanists

Among the U.S. brotherhoods dedicated to the fight against Communism, nothing is quite like the John Birch Society. Except for an elite corps of leaders, its members shun personal publicity, and their names are held by the society in strictest secrecy. Its cells, of 20 to 30 members apiece, take orders from society headquarters, promote Communist-style front organizations that do not use the John Birch name. Carefully avoiding normal channels of political action, the society accepts the hard-boiled, dictatorial direction of one man who sees democracy as a "perennial fraud" and estimates that the U.S. is 40% to 60% Communist-controlled. In other times, other places, the John Birch "Americanists"—as they call themselves—might seem a tiresome, comic-opera joke. But already the society admits to cells in 35 states, and its partisans have made their anonymous and unsettling presence felt in scores of U.S. communities.

In Wichita, Kans., student members of the society are trained to tell their cell leader of any "Communist" influence

noted in classroom lectures; by phone, parents belabor the offending teacher and his principal for apologies and admissions of guilt. A Wichita businessman who planned to make a modest contribution to a University of Wichita fund was dissuaded because members of the society were demanding that certain professors and books be thrown out. "My business would be wrecked," said he, "if those people got on the phone and kept on yelling that I am a Communist because I give money to the school." Society members in Nashville, Tenn., started telephone campaigns to warn homeowners that some of their neighbors were suspected Reds. The project with current top priority is the impeachment of Chief Justice Earl Warren, and activities in a dozen cities range from the "spontaneous" circulation of petitions to a rash of letters to newspapers, and a HELP IMPEACH EARL WARREN banner strung across the main street of Pampa, Texas (and taken down by the police a few hours later).

The Red Plot. All society activity comes under the firm thumb of a balding, deceptively mild-mannered, retired businessman from Belmont, Mass., named Robert Welch. Son of a North Carolina farmer, Baptist Welch, 61, spent 25 years as an executive with Cambridge's famed tool-making James O. Welch Co. (run by his brother). After the war, Welch set up on Communist literature. He decided that such

schemes as social security and federal income tax laws were part of a Red plot to ready the U.S. for Soviet conquest. Welch left candy for fulltime anti-Communist pamphletting in 1957. He founded the John Birch Society the next year, naming it for a U.S. Navy captain killed by Chinese Communist guerrillas after V-J Day.

Welch's *Men of Rome* is a masterpiece of invective called *The Politician*. Shown only to close friends, the book is now being withdrawn from circulation, largely because its judgments on contemporary leaders repelled more people than they attracted. Some Welchian estimates:

¶ **The Eisenhower brothers:** "Milton Eisenhower is actually Dwight Eisenhower's superior and boss within the Communist Party. For [the former President], there is only one possible word to describe his purposes and his actions. That word is treason."

¶ **CIA Director Allen Dulles:** "The most protected and untouchable supporter of Communism, next to Eisenhower himself, in Washington."

¶ **The late John Foster Dulles:** "A Communist agent."

Right-Wing Names. For public consumption, Welch has kept his vitriol well enough in check to avoid libel suits. A prolific author, he has turned out reams of Red-baiting copy, including the *Blue Book* that guides the society's actions. He puts out the monthly *American Opinion*, as well as a bulletin that informs all



Boston Herald-Traveler

LEADER WELCH

His word for the Eisenhowers: treason.

dues-paying (\$24 a year for men, \$12 for women) members of the society's monthly aims. Despite the ill-fame of *The Politician*, Welch has been highly praised as a freedom fighter by a horde of familiar right-wing names, e.g. Actor Adolphe Menjou, Lawyer Clarence Manton, ex-Diplomat Spruille Braden, who grace the society's council and have the right to appoint his successor.

Not all conservatives are so sanguine about Welch. Many object to the society's contempt for dissent from its views, feel that its militant words and thoughts are barely a goose step away from the formation of "goon squads." "This is the kind of thing that does violence to everything we're trying to accomplish," says one Chicago conservative who backed away from Birchism after a glimpse at *The Politician*. "It siphons a lot of well-meaning, respectable people off into a lunatic fringe run by Welch, at the same time giving anti-Communist efforts a black eye. It hurts us much more than it helps us."